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DEPT. OF THE  
U. S. AIR FORCE

HISTORICAL NOTES  
ON THE  
ORLANDO AIR FORCE BASE

AUGUST 1940 -  
OCTOBER 1949

*Orlando Public Library  
Lynncastle Jeep Range*

Orlando long had had plans for a master airport which would permit runways of 4,500-foot length, permitting the landing and take-off of planes so large that they still existed only in the minds of aeronautical engineers. To a great extent, the person who had advocated Orlando as an air center for many years previously, and to whom much credit should go, was S. Wayne Gray, at that time one of the commissioners of the city of Orlando.

Plans for the air installation called for the construction of miles of roads and highways through and adjoining the field for the movement of all types of transport needed for the servicing of the field and its equipment. Already the county was engaged in preliminary road building in the vicinity of the port.

It had been indicated by War Department officials that those groups based at municipal air fields would eventually become permanent bases as the strength of the Air Corps was increased under the air expansion program.

On June 24th, 1940, Mr. Gray revealed that the government would need a large section of desolate country about 20 miles from Orlando for gunnery practice.

"That", said Mr. Gray, "is one of the major requirements for warplanes which will be incessantly at target practice. But, since we have many desolate sections outside the city, that need will not constitute any kind of a problem".

All bombing practice performed by the bombers of the Composite Group was to be on the Tampa bomb range. Intense machine gun practice to

be conducted at the strafing range near Orlando. Later march of events, showed that Mr. Gray, though exceptionally farsighted, fell far short of predicting the magnitudes of developments during the next five or six years.

Already, the municipality of Orlando had taken options on more than 40 acres of land adjacent to the airport. With the signal from the army that the move was to be consummated, a special purchasing commission swung into action. Another 40 acres would extend the boundaries of the base to the southern side of the Cheney highway.

With only one exception, owners of adjoining property cooperated promptly and gladly, but, although the acquisition of this particular acreage would straighten the boundary lines of the land needed by the base, the owner delayed action for many months, until it became necessary to condemn the area as being necessary to the safety of the nation.

#### FUNDS ALLOCATED BY WAR DEPARTMENT

On July 6, 1940, the War Department allocated \$888,226 to the Orlando Municipal Airport for the establishment of an army aviation base here, although the dispatch from Washington gave no indication as to when work would begin it was generally understood that construction would start as soon as the acreage could be acquired.

More details from Washington a few days later included information that 17 barracks buildings, a hospital and five administration buildings would be erected in addition to miscellaneous other structures - totaling 57 buildings.

retained his headquarters at Eglin but commuted between the two installations in the performance of his duties.

In July 1945, Major General Donald Wilson, formerly Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Operations, Commitments and Requirements, was designated commanding general. Later, with the cessation of hostilities in the Pacific, the name of the installation was changed once more — this time to that of "Proving Ground Command".

The mission of the Proving Ground required the testing of methods and aircraft and all instruments of war, as they continued to develop, even during peace time.

On 1 July 1946, the Orlando Proving Ground Command was moved to Eglin Field, Florida, and the recently re-activated Fourteenth Air Force, under the command of Brigadier General Leo A. Walton, set up its headquarters at the base.